

**Outbound student exchange at Australian and New Zealand universities: the
effects of pre-departure decision-making, in-country experiences and post-sojourn
outcomes**

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ABSTRACT

There is increasing student mobility around the world and a growing focus on transnational education. Until a decade ago in Australia and New Zealand the emphasis was on attracting international students to be full-fee paying (FFP) enrolments. Consequently, much of the research has focused on issues relating to the psychosocial and sociocultural adjustment, and learning and teaching needs of FFP international students. Recently, there has been a growing field of work from the US and Europe examining outbound student mobility programs including cultural and language tours, study abroad and student exchange. Although student exchange is purported to be an effective method for increasing the intercultural competence of domestic students to perform in the global marketplace, there is a paucity of research empirically examining the student exchange experience. Thus, this thesis examined student exchange in the Australian and New Zealand context.

This research project investigated the processes and outcomes of the student exchange experience for Australian and New Zealand university students. This thesis examined how many students participate in exchange programs; who these students are; why they participate and what impact this experience has in terms of intercultural competencies and international orientation. This research project is unique as it represents the first detailed national study of student exchange in both Australia and New Zealand.

Reflecting the longitudinal study in this thesis, a model was developed spanning the three phases of the exchange sojourn: pre-departure, in-country, post-exchange. The model incorporated the factors that influence Australian and New Zealand students to participate in an exchange program and the variables which affect their experiences in the host country. It was proposed that these factors influence the outcomes of the

exchange experience. Two additional models provided further details of the factors influencing the exchange decision-making process and students' experiences in the host country.

Multiple methodologies were adopted across the four studies in this thesis in order to understand the factors at all phases of the exchange experience that may impact upon the outcomes of the sojourn. The first study encompassed an analysis of each institution's strategic plan in regards to student mobility to consider organisational factors influencing participation in the exchange program. Additionally, Study One examined student exchange participation at Australian and New Zealand universities from 1996-2005. The second study had two purposes. Firstly, it examined the personal characteristics of exchange students before departing on their sojourn in order to establish a baseline of competencies. Second, Study Two compared these traits with those of non-exchange students to investigate personal drivers and barriers of mobility. The third study was comprised of interviews with students who were studying on an exchange program in Canada to identify the significant experiences of students in the host culture and to gain insight into how their experiences may have influenced the outcomes of the sojourn. The final study explored the changes in exchange students' intercultural competencies by comparing their skills measured at the pre-departure stage with those reported approximately six months after returning home. Study Four also considered students' pre-departure expectations and experiences in the host country.

The findings from Study One revealed that despite increasing attention on outbound student mobility at both the government and university level, in 2001 less than one percent of Australian and New Zealand university students engaged in exchange programs. Furthermore, only 23 out of 40 universities expressed student exchange as a strategic goal. No significant relationship was found between the

presence of a strategic goal of student exchange and the proportion of students participating in the exchange program. However, participation is not simply affected by the presence of a specific goal of mobility, but factors such as organisational culture, leadership and resourcing affect how policy is implemented. Further research examining the impact of these organisational factors is warranted.

The outcome of implementing a policy relating to student mobility is also dependent on the students. The results from Study Two indicated that *a priori* exchange and non-exchange students were different groups, particularly in terms of intercultural competencies and demographics. Before their sojourn, exchange students presented with higher levels of cultural empathy, open-mindedness, social initiative, flexibility and emotional stability than their non-mobile peers; that is, exchange students possessed the necessary intercultural competencies to aid their adjustment in the host culture. The typical exchange student was female, from a middle-upper socio-economic background and enrolled in a dual degree. The reasons reported by exchange students for studying overseas included a desire to maximise their educational success and employment opportunities, to travel and to experience a new culture. In contrast, non-exchange students remained at home due to the cost of going abroad and a lack of awareness of exchange opportunities at the home university.

Study Three provided the link between the factors influencing a student to participate in the exchange program and the reported outcomes by examining their experiences in a host culture, Canada. Overall students reported satisfaction with their in-country experience and few participants identified that they experienced culture shock. This may reflect the perceived negative connotation of this phenomenon. Before departing on their sojourn, the exchange students reported that they had expected life in Canada to be the same as at home. However, they did report mild difficulties with

adjusting to differences in areas such as communication, accommodation, the climate, shopping, teaching and learning methods, and friendships with host nationals. Increasing the perceived value of pre-departure training and ensuring that orientation by the host institution focuses on practical and logistical issues may improve students' expectations and adjustment. Future studies examining the processes of intercultural sojourn should consider more detailed qualitative analysis of students' in-country experiences to gain a deeper understanding of the time abroad and how it may cause changes within the individual.

Study Four revealed that overall there was no change in exchange students' levels of intercultural competencies, regardless of their host destination. However, there was a trend for students to become more flexible because of the exchange experience. In acknowledgment of the findings in the literature of the outcomes of exchange programs, it is speculated that students become more aware of pre-existing skills. While no significant changes in intercultural competencies were observed, further investigation of other skills such as intercultural sensitivity, intercultural communication competence and social self-efficacy is warranted. After their time abroad, the exchange students continued to be internationally oriented, expressing high desire for future work and travel overseas.

In addition to the theoretical models presented in this thesis, this research also has practical implications. The model and the results of these studies provide universities with a better understanding of how to manage their exchange programs. This work is equally relevant to government policy makers as they seek ways to enhance the international capabilities of future employees.

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Finally, this is dedicated to my son, Patrick, for giving me the final motivation to put this chapter of my life to rest- may you enjoy all of the wonders of the world!

SUBMISSION STATEMENT

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Amanda Jayne Daly

Portions of this thesis have been published as:

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Where publications were collaborations with supervisors (Jones, Barker & Troth), I was responsible for all literature reviews, data collection and analyses although I received varying assistance with study design, selection of analytical techniques and interpretation and editing.

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